

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2925
INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, KS, JA
SUBJECT: KOREA-JAPAN MINISTERIAL TALKS

REF: TOYO 14285

1. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS ADVISE THAT ANNOUNCEMENT SCHEDULED AUGUST 18 THAT KOREA-JAPAN MINISTERIAL TALKS WILL BE HELD SEPTEMBER 3-4, AS INDICATED REFTEL. ROK DELEGATION WILL BE LED BY FOREIGN MINISTER, AND INCLUDE MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES, COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, VICE MINISTER OF ECONOMIC PLANNING BOARD, AND AMBASSADOR TO TOKYO. JAPANESE DELEGATION WILL CONSIST OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY, COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, AND VICE MINISTER OF ECONOMIC PLANNING AGENCY.

2. DIRECTOR PAK OF JAPAN DIVISION IN FOREIGN MINISTRY TOLD EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THEY REGARD TALKS AS LARGELY A PUBLIC RELATIONS MEASURE, WITH RELATIVELY LITTLE SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT. APART FROM THE CHRONIC TRADE IMBALANCE HE SAW NO MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. TOKTO-TAKESHIMA, HE CONFIRMED, WOULD BE DISCUSSED BETWEEN THE FOREIGN MINISTERS, APART FROM THE PLENARY SESSION. THERE WOULD
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BE SOME DISCUSSION OF SECURITY ISSUES IN THE PRESENTATIONS OF THE FOREIGN MINISTERS, HE SAID, BUT ONLY IN GENERAL TERMS. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE NOTED BOTH SIDES LAST YEAR HAD DEPLORED THE U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWAL; THIS YEAR HE THOUGHT THE SUBJECT WOULD AGAIN BE TREATED BUT IN PERHAPS A SOMEWHAT MORE OPTIMISTIC VIEN.

3. AS SUGGESTED REFTTEL, PROBLEM OF BILATERAL TRADE IMBALANCE WILL BE AT THE TOP OF THE ROKG'S AGENDA. KOREAN DEFICIT WAS \$1.8 BILLION IN 1977, \$1.6 BILLION FOR THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 1978, AND IS PROJECTED TO RISE TO \$3.0 BILLION FOR THE YEAR AS A WHOLE. PROBLEM IS NOT SO MUCH ECONOMIC (KOREA'S OVERALL TRADE PICTURE IS FAVORABLE, THANKS TO HEALTHY SURPLUSES VIS-A-VIS EUROPE AND U.S.); RATHER, IT IS VIEWED POLITICALLY AS AN IRRITANT TO THE RELATIONSHIP. KOREANS SEE LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASING EXPORTS TO JAPAN'S RESTRICTIVE MARKET, AND EFFORTS TO REDUCE IMPORTS FROM JAPAN HAVE THUS FAR PROVED INEFFECTIVE. DEPRECIATION OF WON VS YEN, RATHER THAN REDUCING THE IMBALANCE, HAS HAD THE OPPOSITE EFFECT OF INCREASING KOREA'S DEFICIT BY RAISING THE UNIT PRICE OF JAPANESE IMPORTS (ROK'S DEMAND FOR JAPANESE RAW MATERIALS AND CAPITAL EQUIPMENT IS HIGHLY PRICE-INELASTIC). JUDGING FROM COMMENTS WE HAVE HEARD FROM OUR MOFA AND COMMERCE MINISTRY CONTACTS, ROKG DOES NOT EXPECT MUCH IN THE WAY OF CONCRETE RESULTS FROM MINISTERIAL, BUT WILL FEEL COMPELLED, NEVERTHELESS, TO REGISTER A STRONG STATEMENT OF CONCERN.

4. COMMENT: PAK OBVIOUSLY IS PUTTING THE BEST POSSIBLE FACE ON THE RELATIONSHIP, WHICH REMAINS A DELICATE ONE, BUT RATIFICATION OF THE CONTINENTAL SHELF AGREEMENT HAS LEFT THE TWO SIDES WITH LITTLE OF SUBSTANCE TO DISPUTE.
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THE KOREANS' STEADILY GROWING CONFIDENCE SHOULD FACILITATE THE FURTHER EASING OF THE EMOTIONAL CONTENT IN THE RELATIONSHIP, ALTHOUGH THAT WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE MAJOR PROBLEM FOR A LONG TIME TO COME. PAK DID SEEM TO TAKE SOME SATISFACTION, WHETHER BUREAUCRATIC OR NATIONALISTIC, FROM THE FACT THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER WOULD LEAD THE KOREAN DELEGATION THIS YEAR, IN CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS OCCASIONS WHEN THE ROK DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAD HAD TO DEAL WITH THE JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTER.
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